

“Advancing the Dream: The Time is Now!”

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Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., was more than a person. For the African-American community and, indeed, for proponents of civil rights everywhere, he represented an ideal. He was a person who sought to fight for equality in the name of justice, goodness, and love for humanity. Since the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, talented African Americans and minorities everywhere have made great strides to advance the principle of equality, but our work is not done. Although King spoke extensively of the destructive nature of poverty and racism, people across all demographics, especially members of the very community for which King fought, are still suffering.

Today, we face one of the worst cases of economic hardships in our nation’s history. “Four out of 5 U.S. adults [will] struggle with joblessness, near-poverty or reliance on welfare for at least parts of their lives,” (Yen). This statistic is bleak, and particularly upsetting for the millions of ambitious young men and women who are about to face the troubling world of student loans, college tuition, and employment in the real-world. As a first-generation Pakistani immigrant and high school senior, I am especially concerned. My family came to this country because of the promise of opportunity and economic well-being that, sadly, was left unfulfilled. In 1961, Reverend King related his experiences of India to a crowd in a commencement address at Lincoln University. ““In Calcutta alone, more than a million people sleep on the side-walks every night;”” he said, ““in Bombay, more than six hundred thousand people sleep on the sidewalks every night”” (King 210). This was the poverty that my grandfather escaped following the India-Pakistan partition. This is the poverty that my family tried to escape when they

immigrated to the United States thirteen years ago. This is the poverty that still ravages India and Pakistan, and is beginning to take a hold on the United States as well. In the richest nation on the planet, millions of people are still sleeping on the street.

Economic insecurity is especially destructive in minorities. In 2012, African-Americans and Hispanics faced unemployment rates of 13.8 and 10.3-percent, respectively, as opposed to the national average of 8.1-percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics). Historically, minorities have made great strides for the betterment of their communities, but these statistics should not come as a surprise. Despite valiant efforts, minorities still face economic disparity and institutionalized racism that is difficult to escape. Poverty breeds poverty, and minorities have been exposed to hundreds of years of subjugation that have ensured nothing but economic insecurity. The cycle is becoming increasingly more difficult to break, as class disparity becomes an increasingly troubling issue in the United States.

Although the statistics look bleak, that is all they are: statistics. Numbers mean very little in the midst of humanity striving for change, but we must be wary of one of the biggest obstacles Reverend King had to face: the believe in the myth of time. The myth of time is the belief that time cures all wounds, when, as King rightfully said, time is neutral. It is the duty of men and women of good-will to fight the forces of ill-will, and it is in the nation's best interest to fight to the forces of racism and poverty. In the most prosperous nation in human history, if we do not stand for the meekest of ourselves, who do we stand for? If we do not preserve the values of equality, justice, and morality that we hold so dear, what do we preserve? It is not enough to sit and complain about the representatives of this nation harboring grid-lock rather than compromise. We must stand and ignore the misinformation that perpetuates lies of the impoverished being lazy, bitter, and gluttonous. We must ignore the myth that racism is dead. It

is only when we recognize our faults as a nation that we can incite change. It is only when we recognize our faults as a nation that we can uphold the dream that so many young men and women are clinging onto in their hearts right now. It is only when we recognize our faults as a nation that the dream lives on.